

CHAMPAGNE CHARLIE

BY

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"CHAMPAGNE CHARLIE"

That's a hell of a soubriquet to hang on a guy but Charlie Townsend doesn't mind. He knows he deserves every nuance of it. And why not? In a sense, he's worked hard to fill the role. Not for the money, of course. That's been in the family for generations. But the pursuit of pleasure is a serious business.

Depending on the point of view, Charlie can be seen as a tennis bum....a man who follows the sun....a perennial bachelor...or simply a rich idler. But on/^{one} principal point, all agree. He is a likeable and charming man.

In his late thirties, he is sun tanned young and since a reporter once tagged him with Champagne Charlie, his pleasant face adorns the newspapers with surprising frequency. He always seems to be in the "right" places and with the "right" names. In Washington, N.Y., Palm Beach, Mexico. Wherever it's fun and games, there you'll find Charlie...playing his theme that life is just one big bubble.

There is just one qualification to be added. None of it is true. That is..the public side of Charlie Townsend is champagne but the private side is....a very different cup of tea.

For this very unusual man's commitment to himself..is a commitment to rooting out crime and criminals. Not the every day garden variety of smalltime crooks but the men/ⁱⁿ high places. The people with power, position and money.

As Champagne Charlie,^{he}/moves easily and naturally in circles denied to people of "lesser" status. The financiers, politicians,

and industrial giants see him as part of their natural landscape and he is tolerated with an amusement and affection. Why not? He's funny, a fine tennis player, as has been noted, a deft hand at the wheel of a racing yacht^{and}/ the perfect single man for a dinner party.

Quite a catalogue. But he needs it all. The more acceptance, the more he is able to find his way into dark corners..made all the more dark by the illumination of the bright and shining lives of the powerful who hide them.

WHY DOES HE DO IT

Many reasons. He is bright..he is concerned. Long ago he saw the waste of too many others born into the same privileged life. Men and woman growing up in a standardized routine, stamped out of a mold and using play as a form of eternal escape.

It was to be different for Charlie Townsend. Very different. When he was very young, he lost his father. It was a suicide. But the newspapers had it as an accident. A drowning accident off an island in Maine during that long ago summer.

It wasn't until years later that Charlie discovered the truth. The company, of which his father had been president, had been looted by men under his control. The responsibility was his..as well as the blame. And he solved it all in the deep waters off Monhegan Island.

Nothing happened to the thieves, of course. It all closed neatly together just^{as}/ Charlie's father had disappeared without a trace. And no one ever really knew or remembered..or cared. Except Charlie.

The men who stole are, for the most part, long since dead. And the few who are left are old and out of harm's way. Now and then Charlie feels the need to exercise the old ghosts but a vendetta is not really his style. It is the expose of the new robber barons that draws him. The men who steal from the public...the officials who sell out...the "respectables" who bankroll the rackets.

HOW HE DOES IT

Charlie, of course, has no official or legal standing..no power of arrest. But moving as he does, unsuspected, among the upper strata, his antennae pick^{up}/wisps and rumors. Everyone trusts Champagne Charlie who's ~~always~~ good for a laugh.

He hears..he sees...he surmises. A sudden disappearance... a newly found sum of money...an unexpected death. He fits pieces together.

Only two people know Champagne Charlie's other life.